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Identifying the roadblocks: What impedes the transition of secondary seriously emotionally disturbed students?

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IDENTIFYING THE ROADBLOCKS: WHAT IMPEDES THE TRANSITION OF SECONDARY SERIOUSLY EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED STUDENTS?

A Project

Presented to the

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In Partial Fulfillment

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in

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ABSTRACT

From the inception of Public Law 94:142, those in the special education field have experienced first hand, the advent of special education students transitioning from high school to a more meaningful adult life. Numerous changes in federal and state policies have generated an advocacy of intervention equal to the task of fostering successful outcomes. Major impediments affecting the transition of seriously emotionally disturbed secondary students are discussed through a qualitative review of related literature and teaching methodologies.

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS TRANSITION?

Transition, in layman's terms, generally describes an individual's conceptualized movement from one location to another. Webster's Compact Dictionary (1987) defines the noun *transition* as: "passage from one state, stage, or subject to another." Transition in educational terminology represents programming designed to facilitate a student's movement from a secondary school program to adult life. Section 101(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (PL 101: 476), defines "transition services" as:

> A coordinated set of activities, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.

Professionals providing special education services for students identified as Seriously Emotionally Disturbed (SED) have long realized the frustrations associated with the anticipated successful outcomes of post-secondary SED students. According to Rusch, Destefano, Chadsey-Rusch, Phelps, & Syzmanski (1992), SED students comprise only 2% of all students served by current model transition projects. This disparaging statistic typifies the modality of current services as they apply to the anomalous status of the SED student. Continuing to provide intermittent support services negates the impetus and meaning of the word *transition*. Special educators must embrace existing alternatives and current innovations that promote true transition concepts, programming, and facilitation. Failing to implement more complete transition services revises the aspect of repeating the inequities of previous programming. The proverbial horse is

no longer behind the cart; he is now a passenger, dictating just how fast this ideology should be pulled through the education continuum.

The current rationale for educating all children in heterogeneous classrooms was slightly resurrected through voter initiatives such as the Regular Education Initiative (REI) (Jenkins, Pious, & Jewell, 1990). While politically-motivated initiatives such as the REI or the more tumultuous California Voucher Initiative come and go, the basis of their advocacy remains succinct. The concepts of full inclusion are alive and well. Aligning the dual-system mechanisms of education will be an ongoing process. Advocacy of this progression toward educational parity is well documented in recent literature, including Lieberman (1990), Jenkins et al. (1990), Kauffman (1989), Stainback and Stainback (1984), and Villa and Thousand (1988).

Bickel and Bickel (1986) proposed present-day education programs adopting foundational principles similar to those advocated in effective schools pedagogy. An "effective school" places a greater emphasis upon the school entity, making a difference in the student's educational performance. The internal staff support system is designed to give administrators and teachers a shared responsibility in maintaining a favorable school climate. Instruction within effective classrooms emphasizes that learning also takes place in a larger social context, away from the geography of the school's physical plant.

Current individualized education and individualized transition plans (IEP/ITP) continue evolving toward a more comprehensive, vocationally-based entity. One of several plausible effects emerging from the vocational perspective is developing an early awareness regarding the SED student's self-worth. A student's self-worth forms the preliminary cornerstone for developing job-related values, attitudes, and ongoing career exploration.

In order to fulfill the obligations of special educators and service providers, it must be assured that each year of the transition process augments the following school year. A student's progress and growth, as outlined in the IEP, must not be contingent upon the whims and time constraints prevalent within the confines of the education system. As special educators, an attitude of advocacy must be maintained rather than repeating the hollow dictums of the past. Transition toward a successful adult life can best be established through recognizing a student's success each class period every day, rather than waiting to discuss this success at a scheduled IEP meeting.

CHAPTER ONE

ROADBLOCKS PREEMPTING SUCCESS

Outlined within this thesis are crucial factors addressing the complexities of developing and implementing the IEP as they pertain to transition. The very least to be accomplished is to create an IEP which addresses long-term transition goals as well as immediate comprehensive program needs. Rusch et al. (1992) confirmed that with behavior disorders, SED students account for only 2% of youths served by traditional transition projects nationwide. Increasing this statistic compels special educators, the reformers, to engage in more innovative methodologies departing from the unrealistic traditional means of education.

Sections of this thesis will address each of Jeffrey's (1993) salient components preempting successful transition: (a) pervasive academic underachievement across grade levels, (b) education within segregated and/or self-contained learning environments, (c) inappropriately designed or repetitive IEP goals and behavioral objectives, (d) inadequate infusion of social and career skills within curriculums, (e) limited exposure to vocational and career development opportunities at the primary and middle school level, and (f) negligent student attendance.

Amelioration of these impediments will require consistent collaboration and communication, long after the adjournment of IEP/ITP meetings. Although roles within the IEP/ITP team may not require redefinition, accountability regarding each participant's responsibilities should remain constant. The number of school placement changes incurred annually by SED students may have strong implications regarding repeated academic and social failure.

While frequent change in school placement does not guarantee failure, it does limit the positive social/emotional benefits associated with stability. Maintaining stability through periods of program fluctuation requires additional collaborative consultations among the school psychologist, previous year's teacher, program specialist, and current teacher. Lack of collaborative evaluation often leads to assigning nonessential coursework, or repetitive goals and objectives, as discussed in item (c) above. Mastery of a proposed mainstream subject and generalization of the subject's skills is more likely to occur after evaluating the student's current strengths. Current learning goals should be designed to augment, rather than repeat, previously written IEP goals.

Establishing checkpoints during critical junctions of the IEP process decreases the likelihood of duplicating previously written annual goals. Without collaborative input from the previous year's teacher, previously collected data has little bearing on structuring the *current* IEP document. Permitting program redundancies during the IEP development greatly hinders implementation of relevant transition goals and related services. Reteaching previously mastered skills disregards exposing the student to experiential outlets which utilize school district staff and community resources.

As an SED student progresses toward independence, the demands for job-related social skills increases. SED teaching methodologies, which are rooted in the older clinical behavior management model, should be changed to a more realistic community-based vocational education program. IEP meetings are intended to function as ongoing cooperative program revisions, which take place at prescribed intervals throughout the student's special education placement.

When students are placed in an SED program by means of an administrative placement, educational priorities, as well as transition services, are not adequately researched. Administrative placements bypass the usual complement of participants for the purposes of granting an emergency placement. Administrative placement meetings are usually convened by district administrative personnel, program specialist, school principal, school psychologists, parents or guardian, and the student. The absence of teaching personnel during this initial placement meeting often delays the coordination and implementation of Designated Instructional Services (DIS). Services prescribed in the previous school setting routinely require evaluation of program components, ensuring the services are credible, adequate, and up to date. Although the administrative decision complies with federal, state, and county guidelines, it is usually accomplished for the sake of immediacy, or for maintaining an aire of detente within a given school district or Special Education Local Planning Area (SELPA).

By delaying or omitting the transition plan normally generated through IEP team collaboration, gaps are inadvertently created in the delivery of DIS. The administratively assigned SED student is placed in an unnecessary holding pattern regarding the introduction and acquisition of vocational, recreation/leisure, social, and domestic skills. Failing to establish or maintain any aspect of the transition process threatens completion of these vital components, crucial toward forming the transition structure.

Integrating special education students into mainstream classrooms can be an effective method for expanding the intrastructure of transition. The aspect of a successful placement in mainstream classes is greatly diminished due to the omission of specific mainstreaming criteria. Lewis and Doorlag (1983) highlighted the utilization of a mainstreaming team in order to

determine the feasibility of a proposed mainstream course. The placement criteria employed by the mainstreaming team should include, at the very least: facilitating, supervising, and evaluating the prescribed objectives and goals of the IEP.

A. PERVASIVE ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT

Pervasive academic underachievement among SED secondary students encompasses a wide range of school factors. Beginning in the elementary grades, students identified as SED are systemically excluded from traditional classroom environments, as well as social situations. Bower (1969) defined emotionally handicapped children as those exhibiting the following five characteristics, demonstrated to a marked degree, and over a period of time:

1. Inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors
2. An inability to build or maintain interpersonal relationships with peers or teachers
3. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal conditions
4. A general, pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression
5. A tendency to develop physical symptoms, pains, or fears associated with personal or school problems.

With the SED label in place during this early developmental stage, quite often an ambivalence or general apathy toward school emerges. Many of these students exhibit significant cognitive delays, further compounding the assumed failure identity. Students exhibiting behavior disorders experience difficulty coping with the academic demands of the classroom. They may exhibit poor reading and organizational skills and have trouble with math and other basic school subjects.

Some identified school failure characteristics include noncompliance, poor study habits, inadequate or nonexistent homework practices, inability to work independently, poor participation in class discussions or demonstrations, noncompletion of assignments, refusal to probe or ask questions in class. These important social skill areas must be addressed when IEP and transition goals are discussed and decided.

For many students, there is a significant correlation between learning disabilities and the severity of inappropriate classroom behaviors (Lewis & Doorlag, 1983). Developing academic lessons and activities that greatly reference a student's accumulated life experiences, vocational skills, and other interests greatly enhance learning. A key aspect of successful mainstreaming, according to Beden and Dixon (1987), suggests developing inter-agency linkage between IEP and ITP members and a vocational counselor. This linkage may provide assistance in developing more meaningful interventions when prioritizing IEP academic goals, developing learning and daily assignment objectives, vocational assessment activities, and vocationally-oriented simulations. Feichtner and Sarkees (1987) examined the practicality of including employability and basic skills regarding career development practices when structuring the IEP.

The incorporation of career development practices during the primary and middle school levels shifts the emphasis of program responsibility toward the student. Achieving a smooth transition from school to work is unlikely without effective career development practices and career education curricula present in IEP objectives (Humes & Hohenshil, 1985).

Continued exposure to a segregated placement dilutes self-perception and gradually erodes motivation toward learning. Initially lacking this actuating segment of the success rubric, SED students typically start over again with the inception of each school year. Seeing themselves as

square pegs further galvanizes the lack of self-acceptance of their role in traditional education. A primary goal of the California Strategic Plan for Special Education (1990) is to provide access to core curriculum and other school-based services.

The significance of these services formulates the state's desire to maximize an SED student's learning strengths, as well as support effective individualized services within the classroom. Based upon comparison studies conducted by Rusch et al. (1992), the percentage (2%) of SED students receiving transition services reflects the true nature of access to school resources. Lacking program parity, the square pegs continually struggle to fit in. Public laws prohibit exclusion; however, they do not remove the reality of lowered expectations and pejorative labeling.

Deficient basic skills at the secondary level also result in diminished mainstreaming opportunities. Students possessing limited exposure to mainstream coursework from previous school years enter high school significantly behind academically. Not only do they exhibit poor reading and computation skills, they also display insufficient organizational skills. These basic skills consistent with academic success may include: how to take notes (dictation skills), how to study for quizzes and tests, how to do a term/research paper, and so on (Beden & Dixon, 1987). From a social skills perspective, communication skills (such as asking staff, peers, or parents for academic assistance) are not developed adequately for high school. Amelioration of these deficiencies may require the expertise of the district program and resource specialists, school psychologist, or other personnel providing IEP mandated DIS services.

Cooperative learning formats with peer assistants provide additional opportunities for skill remediation and modeling of specific social behaviors, as set forth in the IEP (Schniedewind &

Salend, 1987). The numerous academic and social advantages of employing this teaching strategy are extensively highlighted in educational research. Cooperative learning formats often serve as the catalyst for adapting current vocational education practices into the structure of daily academics.

Striving for IEP team accord throughout the transition process was highlighted in research conducted by Izzo and Dennis (1988). Developing a well-orchestrated individualized education plan requires equal participation from the student, vocational education teacher, special and regular education teachers, counselors, psychologists, parents, or parent advocates, Designated Instructional Service (DIS) personnel, and, when applicable, adult service agencies such as the California Departments of Rehabilitation and Employment Development.

B. NONINTEGRATED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Numerous factors contributing to unsuccessful transition outcomes have been examined within the text of this thesis. Given the structure of the school as an educational collective, the classroom teachers represent the greatest determining factor toward a student's school success. The roadblocks previously outlined are not intended to represent the totality of factors contributing to program failure, merely the ones this writer deems accessible toward improvement.

With the emphasis on managing and monitoring behavioral outbursts as prescribed in the student's IEP, the structure of an SED classroom often deviates from the pragmatics of teaching a variety of subject matter. Behavior modification techniques typically associated with SED programs are based upon reinforcing good behavior with an immediate reward or reinforcer (Martin & Pear, 1983).

The logical implications regarding this aspect of behavior modification are credible, given the situational parameters in the SED classroom. Too often, however, the frequency, pattern, and appropriateness of a reinforcer becomes commonplace and predictable to the student. Allowing one dimension of the IEP to become the singular focus compromises the educational resources otherwise available to both student and teacher. Formulating classroom management criteria devoid of academic expectations precludes achievement as the equivalent to receiving extrinsic treats rather than passing grades.

Kauffman (1985) examined six specific areas in which the school contributes to the development of disordered behavior and academic failure. Briefly, they are:

1. Insensitivity to children's individuality,
2. Inappropriate expectations,
3. Inconsistent management,
4. Instruction in nonfunctional and irrelevant skills,
5. Nefarious contingencies of reinforcement, and
6. Undesirable models.

Within Riverside County Lower Desert SELPA, the prescribed SED teaching model is the "self-contained" classroom. Self-contained classrooms are usually located in remote areas of the main school campus, often housed in portable or temporary classrooms. Assigning insensitive prefixes, such as "relocatible," "portable," or "trailer," to a classroom number broadcasts an aura of transiency, once again reinforcing self-doubt.

The self-contained SED classroom is usually structured to ameliorate antisocial behaviors exhibited by the student in previous school settings. Concentrating several behavior disordered

students to one classroom over the course of the school year is not likely to provide the model necessary for reducing inappropriate behaviors. Quite often, well-intended interventions succumb to the priorities of administrative convenience, gradually assuming the ineffective characteristics they initially intended to change. These undesirable models of educating have become dumping grounds, rarely producing a diploma-bound student.

In Transition Services Language Survival Guide for California (1991), Campbell views transition as the key to the success of special education in the future. The continued practice of deploying segregated classrooms compromises this movement by creating too many obstacles. These identified obstacles of mainstreaming form cul-de-sacs of resistance, accumulating those students unaccustomed to success.

There is an emerging trend in education toward adopting "effective schools" rationale (Bickel & Bickel, 1986). Lawrence and Winchell (cited in Schloss, 1986) found that studies conducted in the 1970s examined the correlation between teacher provided instructional support and used the student's personal experiences to augment success across academic areas. According to Mercer and Snell (cited in Schloss, 1986), expanding further on lesser intrusive forms of instructional support, the reviewed literature revealed that lessons or activities laden with excessively intrusive instruction resulted in students becoming overdependent on external cues and assistance. Advocates of effective school pedagogy employ lessons that increase choice-making opportunities, as well as fostering healthy risk taking.

A key component of these student-centered lessons is the addition of a self-monitoring evaluation component (Lerner, 1985). When students are encouraged to self-monitor various forms of criticism, this usually provides more relevant venues for increased understanding of a

given lesson. Self-correcting or self-grading in pretests increases personal accountability, usually resulting in higher post-test scores. As test scores rise, participation in other lesson-related activities, such as reviewing or studying, increases.

A recent study conducted by Durand and Berotti (1991) attempted to determine the efficacy of replacing problem behavior with a communication alternative. The following question was proposed: Are behavior problems a form of nonverbal communication, therefore making it possible to teach alternative ways of communicating? Whether or not the hypothesis has merit, analyzing a problem behavior within this context expands the accepted perception regarding the nature of school-related behavior problems. An ongoing process of assimilating intervention alternatives into transition plans allows for greater flexibility regarding potential community-based or school job training sites.

Most classrooms designed to service SED students contain posted rules and consequences, differentially interpreted and enforced by individual teachers. The types of consequences range from a five minute time-out period, loss of an activity or free time to more aversive punishment such as isolation or suspension from school. Other disciplinary measures may include: isolated lunch from peers, losses of tokens or points leading to loss of a manipulative activity or snack reward, loss of free time, play activities, assemblies, recess, breaks between class periods, bathroom breaks, and ultimately, the loss of mainstream programming. The severity or frequency of these forms of behavior may necessitate either conference consisting of the student, parent(s), and teacher(s). When more extreme behaviors are documented, conferences may also include school site administrators, law enforcement, and probation department personnel.

By remaining locked into one system, SED students are deprived the opportunity of observing and experiencing first-hand the problem-solving abilities of their regular education peers. These students are also insulated from the intervention strategies employed by other teachers and service providers, compounding the "I can only fit in here" myth. The majority of SED teachers within SELPAs develop a behavioral contingency plan designed to accompany the student's current IEP. Derived from the initial IEP meeting, the contingency plan outlines inappropriate behavior(s) traditionally exhibited by the student and the recommended interventions or consequences assigned each category of behavior.

As aversive forms of behavioral interventions fail to yield favorable results, it is likely the expected types of negative social behaviors will be exhibited in future, post-high school settings (Eschenmann, 1988). This clarifies how defensive behaviors of at-risk students assimilate to the failure expectation they associate with trying something new. Classroom environments promoting peer acceptance rather than aptitude do exist.

In student-centered classrooms, students demonstrated higher levels of achievement. In this case, success proportionally correlated to increases in student responsibility, determining course content (Eschenmann, 1988).

Remaining self-contained or separate within a high school campus limits exposure to an array of coursework. The following segment explores methods of instructional strategy, necessary for elements of the transition process. In elementary school SED programs, mastery of core curriculums, such as reading, math, science, and art, are routed through a maze of busy work activities, inappropriately used manipulatives, and repetitive work sheets.

Basic academic skills mastery is more likely to occur when instructional strategies are based on a student's current skill competence and previously related exposure to the given task. A task analysis is conducted in order to develop realistic strategies for adapting skills acquisition to the attainment of an annual goal. Conducting a task analysis, as identified by Lerner (1985), assists in determining short-term teaching objectives and the sequence of skills development in academic subjects. Integrating the two processes may serve as a litmus test to assure IEP goals are realistic and manageable. The completed task analysis will reveal a more thorough appraisal of a student's learning subskills, specifically organization, learning habits, and verbal command.

Assessing these individuals' needs greatly assist the teacher in selecting the most appropriate means of lesson delivery. Teaching methodologies or models, such as tutorials, direct instruction, sequential prompt instruction, guided practice, and clinical teaching, can be adapted to a variety of curricula and learning situations. In certain cooperative learning situations, minimizing the teacher's role encourages students to rely on personal experiences when developing their own solution criteria. The teacher can provide enough support to germinate potential solutions, yet not so much that the student's own resources are left unchallenged (Schloss, 1986). The importance of providing the appropriate level of instructional support was highlighted in research which showed that excessively intrusive instruction may result in student overdependence on external assistance (Schloss, 1986).

Obvious discrepancies exist regarding accessibility of teaching environments which house additional sources of information and technological training. Timely use of resources at most campuses enhances generalization of given skills across subject areas or courses. Receiving academic instruction solely from one source for the duration of the school day should be regarded

as a temporary measure. More often, self-contained classrooms become the accepted learning model regarding the student's daily schedule and implementation of IEP objectives. Teaching within self-contained learning environments limits the variety and scope of training within a prescribed subject area of the IEP. Soliciting student participation and ultimate subject fluency is concomitant with the teacher's understanding, organization, and presentation of lessons.

Maintaining the desired motivation toward academic success through the school year necessitates infusion of the resources present in the mainstream. Restricting passage from one state, stage, or place to another (transition), further replicates adversity. Fulfilling the goal of full inclusion demands applying the results of previous research, otherwise the roles of inconsistent managers will be condoned.

C. INADEQUATE INFUSION OF CAREER AND SOCIAL SKILLS WITHIN ACADEMIC CURRICULUMS

Recent career education and vocational literature highlight elements vital to comprehensive transition plans. Career education, from its inception, was designed to be infused across each academic discipline. Feichtner and Sarkees (1987) suggested career lesson formats and activities vary in sophistication where grade level is concerned. Incorporating career development activities and simulations at the elementary and middle school levels, teachers provide career awareness and orientation.

Special education programs operating under the auspices of the Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE) have adopted a functional or critical skills curriculum model. The curriculum is based on the following critical skills-domain areas: community living skills, recreation/leisure skills, domestic skills, and vocational skills. However, the lack of successful outcomes at the

secondary level indicates most SED students do not possess the age-appropriate critical skills possessed by their nonhandicapped peers (Harris & McCormick, 1990).

Skills that help a child succeed during future transition settings are commonly referred to as survival skills. Generic categories of survival skills include: independent work skills, group attending or participation skills, following class routines, following directions, functional communication skills, and social or play skills (Harris & McCormick, 1990).

Infusing career education activities with the four domain areas fosters development of job-related values and developing survival skills. Mainstreaming SED students into classrooms with nonhandicapped peers provides an additional venue for rehearsing each of these necessary transition skills. Limiting mainstreaming opportunities limits acquisition of critical skills, as well as environments and practice situations. Regular education students (peer tutors), utilized as "sounding-boards," greatly assist in the critical skills development of SED students. Students lacking exposure to immediate feedback and other naturally-occurring consequences usually exhibit coping problems when entering the world of work. Viadero (1993) contended that being able to take criticism or innocent teasing from fellow workers seemed a problem, attributable to those types of interactions not allowed in the classroom.

Introducing career education concepts at the primary grade level establishes an early mindset of self-worth for the SED student. Supporters of career education advocate students take a proactive, independent role in determining their forthcoming school program. The development of choice-making skills during this early stage reinforces the student's role as a competent decision maker. The first planks or independent choices of the "transition bridge" solidify over time when properly installed at the primary grade level.

Vocational interests of SED students emerge gradually from within a career education perspective (Humes & Hohenshil, 1985). Job-related training goals should match the job interests expressed by the student. IEP team members should consider the student's previous vocational repertoire and interpersonal skills before writing job training goals. The scheduling of training situations and the duration of training should also correlate with previously completed goals in other domain areas. Career activities in the classroom set the stage by enhancing job skills required at community-based training sites. The student's vocational abilities are realized through direct and immediate feedback from job coaches, job supervisor, and co-workers. In bridging the gap from dependence to independence, job training is a step toward breaking the dependency cycle.

Research compiled within Riverside County reveals that most jobs are lost due to a lack of appropriate social skills than for any other reason. Developing social skills in students should be commensurate with teaching any academic skill. A social skills format that complements the realistic needs, interests, and strengths of a student is more likely to be accepted by the student. Positive job attitudes emerging during classroom activities should be reinforced, applying the accepted means of immediate reinforcement. These same attitudes or social skills should then be channeled toward reinforcing corresponding employability skills. Applicability of social skills training becomes more relevant when applied to the context of proposed job training sites. Just as the task analysis breaks down a specific skill for the purpose of training, corresponding social skills must be identified and be present at each step of vocational training.

Recently, the Inter-Agency Committee on Learning Disabilities (ICLD) (Gresham & Elliott, 1989) revised its definition of learning disabled (LD) to include social skill deficits as a primary

learning disability. According to Gresham and Elliott, studies indicated that many children classified as LD display social skills deficits. These findings necessitate alternative approaches to teaching social skills. A plausible concept is synthesizing experiential activities or hands-on experiences in combination with traditional curricula applications.

When teaching a new vocational skill through a one-dimensional workbook approach, the student receives a limited concept of the utility and application of the skill. Falvey (1986) observed that skills will not directly generalize to situations or events outside the classroom without an adequate number of trials outside the classroom.

D. NEGLIGENT ATTENDANCE

Social skill deficits among SED students represent an intricate cross-section, comprising a matrix of emotional instability. An array of behavioral factors ranging from avoidance to permanent forms of escape manifests in various forms of nonattendance. Individuals identified as SED possess similar traits present in both LD and conduct disordered students. This fusion of labels greatly confounds the expectation of acceptable attendance and success in the classroom. Negligent attendance is common among this student population and often targeted for amelioration in the IEP. Failure to acknowledge the previous year's pattern of attendance, the accumulation of incomplete or failing grades, or lack of implementing more effective interventions will have little effect on reversing the existing trend of negligent attendance.

Evaluation of antecedents, the behaviors occurring just prior to a targeted behavior, may reveal established patterns of avoidance-related behaviors. Examining the frequencies of these antecedents may generate more relevant student-centered interventions during class time situations, and ultimately increasing effective decision making among SED students. Behaviors

of a more passive, aggressive nature, specifically the avoidance behaviors associated with truancy, reveal fewer observable antecedents during class time. Longer durations of observing the student outside the classroom and compiling/interpreting the data collected may reveal antecedents previously overlooked.

Inconsistent or infrequent attendance does not always correlate with poor academic and social performance at school. Excessive substance and/or alcohol abuse, familial breakups, lack of transportation, and poverty are significant factors contributing to poor attendance and truancy.

Other familial factors contributing to negligent attendance may include: frequent relocation/moving, dysfunctional or addictive behavior exhibited within the family, the student is the singular source of income, the student is regularly needed to babysit or maintain the household. Regardless of the rationale for allowing their children to miss school, the IEP team must maintain a workable plan of support, designed to readily assist families with developing more feasible home interventions.

SED students are within the highest at-risk category of high school dropouts. Attendance patterns may not be accurate predictors of quitting; however, these patterns indicate the reluctance of "buying-in" or commitment to the school process. Weinrich (1990) examined the preferential treatment of college-bound students exhibiting good patterns of attendance received. By comparison, the remaining 50%, which consisted of the dropouts and truants, lacked preparation for either college or employment.

Kauffman (1985) observed that truants from an elementary school improved their attendance when the school principal stopped by their classrooms to compliment them on their presence in

class. These types of support interventions are present in classrooms structured around career education models.

Many local school districts are implementing strategic solutions for addressing problem attendance. Current literature suggests instituting an attendance criteria that distributes the burden of attendance accountability:

1. Parents should be told as soon as possible, using a standard school process, that their child was tardy or absent.

2. Good class attendance should be rewarded by a communication from the principal or other tangible incentives.

3. Teachers should encourage good school attendance, e.g., a teacher may tell a student that he/she looks forward to seeing the child the next day.

4. The current teacher adopts data collection methods updating previous attendance history of the child.

5. Staff should determine those children identified as attendance risks, and methods to improve attendance should be implemented.

Without intending to, the special education programs in which SED students are initially placed contribute to forthcoming attendance problems. A cycle of recidivism is created early on by insulating the child from exposure to naturally-occurring consequences for poor attendance. The current practice of inconsistent attendance monitoring and assigning of appropriate consequences across grade levels compromises the intent of the transition process.

High schools within the Desert Sands Unified School District (DSUSD) adopted an attendance policy, wherein any student absent from a class 14 days within a school semester

automatically fails that class. The student is then referred to the School Attendance Review Board (SARB) for additional punitive or legal action. Special education students are expected to adhere to district policies governing attendance, truancies, etc.; however, SED students are found to be exempt from the attendance accountability process, as well as any imposed sanctions.

A 17-year-old male student enrolled in an SED class was absent 179 out of the 185 prescribed school days during the 1993 calendar school year. The student's parents were called to task by the SARB process during the first month of the 1993 school year. Failure to comply with SARB's initial directives would directly violate statutes of the Education Code, resulting in the case being referred to the District Attorney's office. The case was not reviewed further, and there were no consequences assigned the student or his parents. This same student returned to school in September 1994, accruing 19 absences midway through the first grading quarter. Ironically, the SARB system, that failed to act previously, dictated policy that automatically fails the student due to the number of days missed during the semester. Who failed whom?

CHAPTER TWO

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. MAINSTREAMING ALTERNATIVES

Preparing a special education student for successful mainstreaming depends upon the versatility and synergism of the IEP team members involved in the process. IEP goals and objectives should augment previously attained skills, as well as student competence. Preparing any SED student for mainstream coursework necessitates assessing academic and social skills.

A preview of course content and curriculum material should determine the starting point for introducing lessons prior to mainstreaming. A gradual introduction of fractions concepts early in the school semester would be tailored to match the SED student's levels of math performance. As each new skill is carefully added to existing areas of fluency, apprehension toward full-time participation in the regular math class is decreased.

Periodic encounters with peer or cross-age tutors is a nonthreatening form of immersion, allowing the special education student to sample and observe the behavior repertoires of regular education students. The student may also benefit from an interim placement with a resource teacher. The smaller class size and additional one-to-one support provide an alternative class setting similar in many respects to the SED classroom.

During this aspect of mainstreaming preparation, it is imperative to incorporate the teaching of personal responsibility skills. Developing independent decision-making skills increases

opportunities for special education students to experience a proactive role in the designated classroom.

Utilizing learning strategies, such as role-playing and cooperative learning models in homogeneous groupings, provides an arena for SED students to be evaluated constructively within a small group by similar peers. Role-playing within small groups is an effective way for a passive student to gradually increase assertiveness, while decreasing anxiety levels often associated with more densely populated regular classrooms. Cooperative learning naturally reduces competition associated with larger heterogeneous groups. The emphasis, or long-term goal of a smaller cooperative learning group, is directed toward higher levels of self-esteem and participation, positive relationships, acceptance, support, and trust. Villa and Thousand (1988) observed that as group participation skills increase in special education settings, regular education students can be reverse mainstreamed into the special education class. This subtle form of combining students is designed to accommodate acquisition of participation skills, as exhibited by students of differing ethnic, gender, or socioeconomic groupings.

Although mainstreaming opportunities exist for SED students, great care must be taken in selecting regular or alternative education settings. A successful mainstream placement should be based on the special needs of the learner, as outlined in the student's current IEP. Examining the logistical constraints of class size, location, daily schedule, and organization of learning environment assists greatly in determining feasibility of the proposed classroom.

Facilitating learning while simultaneously increasing appropriate classroom behaviors, teachers incorporate lesson formats designed to:

1. Provide an alternative venue for emotional expression.

2. Provide a constructive outlet for expressing and communicating emotions.

3. Instill self-concept and confidence.

4. Use small group instruction for the purpose of developing and modeling social skills.

5. Promote learning situations that increase work habits and expressive skills.

Increasing work habits can be enhanced by promoting personal responsibility. These activities should evolve from previous interventions that focused on introducing work-related values. SED students become successful in changing problem behaviors when their role in the decision-making process increases. Integration should proceed gradually, initially in less stringent academically structured coursework programs. Allowing opportunities for the severely handicapped (SH)/SED student to experience intermittent success could result in a reduction of mainstreaming anxieties. Verbal acknowledgement or praising this newly discovered dimension of the SH/SED student could generate additional independent decision making, specifically in choosing and selecting regular classes and teachers. The importance of special education students becoming an integral part of school life is examined extensively in current literature. Maximizing each mainstream opportunity available on the school campus greatly increases a student's self-worth and motivation. These experiences are requisite to continued participation in mainstream classes and future job placements in community settings.

Integration into mainstream education must remain a constant goal when prioritizing IEP objectives. Special education students have greater access to regular school programs than in previous years. Advocates of inclusionary education must not dismiss the lesser regarded aspects of the school days, such as riding the school bus, attending assembly programs and pep rallies, obtaining an I.D. and/or Associated Student Body card, voting in campus elections, utilizing on-

campus support groups, accessing the library and/or media center, eating lunch, joining clubs/coalitions or organizations, participating in after-school activities (such as band, athletics, drama, chorus, or dance), attending school dances, sporting events, musicals, plays, field trips, fund-raisers, etc. Nurturing the branching out of SH/SED students may require expanding teacher roles to include extracurricular assignments.

Art education, considered by many as play time, is a highly disciplined yet stimulating endeavor. Art education can serve as both an academic and vocational catalyst for students described as academically deficient.

Quite often, art students display their work on campus and in community shows, thus increasing social integration situations. After all, art or drawing is a rudimentary method of communicating needs. It supersedes written and oral language and the sophistication required to articulate and record it.

Traditionally, art education has been a part of special education. Carter and Miller (1971) investigated use of the visual arts with learning disabled children. Further studies by Carter focused on research to increase growth of perceptual awareness in learning disabled children. Wood (1977) reported a study conducted with learning disabled students using an art-based treatment program. Gair (1974) utilized an art-based visual perceptual program to remediate selected psycho linguistic abilities in children with learning disabilities. Ronald Jones, a teacher at the Indiana Girls' School Correctional Facility in Indianapolis, has documented significant gains in the areas of improving self-esteem and reestablishing self-respect through the use of student directed video projects produced during art class (Gair, 1974).

Art education has proven invaluable as a therapeutic alternative when addressing and identifying emotional needs of SH/SED clients. Kramer (1971) observed the therapeutic value of art to reduce the defensiveness of clients whose disabilities are primarily emotional, and psychic organization is weak during times of increased academic pressure. Studies conducted by Cooke, Heron, and Heward (1983-1984) determined that the effectiveness of peer tutoring programs was contingent on the incorporation of personal accountability strategies when training designated tutors.

B. WORK ETHICS EDUCATION

The success of secondary level vocational training is based upon the amount of "real" exposure to job-related experiences. Many SED students do not perceive the importance of vocational skills, as these skills pertain to job preference. Incorporating work ethics education at the primary, middle and secondary level assists in establishing needed values and personal responsibility skills required during the most crucial point of transition, post-graduation.

Modeling work ethics in the classroom reinforces positive choice-making skills. The lack of adequate modeling and inconsistent job success in home settings impacts the student's ability to make realistic vocational choices. When designing work ethics activities, consider the possible negative effects home environments present to completion of assigned projects. Lessons and activities should be streamlined to accommodate the following interpersonal elements: (a) gaining reliability and trust, (b) willingness to work, (c) willingness to listen and learn, (d) responsibility for one's actions, (e) the ability to work cooperatively, and (f) the importance of living independently.

Students entering off-campus job training will often need to display job behaviors essential to adjusting and coping with the demands associated with a work environment. At the middle school and secondary levels, these concepts vital to employment could be facilitated through classroom discussion groups. Panels consisting of parents, campus work experience personnel, transition counselor, high school counselor, and teachers are afforded the opportunity to discuss the genuine job concerns of the SED student.

A work ethics format may serve to identify critical areas requiring job development at each level comprising the transition milieu. High school age SED students cannot be expected to catch on to this transition concept without being provided the background during their preliminary education. Lesson design should allow for these and other expected discrepancies, as outlined within the student's IEP. Maintaining constant growth concerning these requisite life skills will contribute to a more complete and successful transition. Admittedly, high school is not an accurate representation of the work world. Adapting lesson formats simulating relevant job situations are useful methods of practicing the values and work ethics required for future community success.

C. FILLING A VOID

The academic expectations of SED students participating in the traditional education framework appear rooted in the archaic credo, "the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few." The few references in this case represent the student population strata regarded as "special." Moore and Gysbers (1979) observed these labeled students tend to be viewed as objects to be brought up to grade level by the end of the school year. Although much has been

gained in the struggle for educational parity, SED teachers must still resort to extraneous tactics with regard to placing an SED student outside his/her designated educational track.

A less intrusive alternative to the traditional educational approach is the career development perspective. In October 1991, The Los Angeles Times published an article heralding a much needed educational model. Vera Katz, a state representative of Oregon, authored Education 2000, a vocational alternative to traditional four-year secondary programs. This proposal greatly enhances the job prospects of SED students by concentrating on career development in the last two years of high school. Career development places a premium on viewing students as persons, personalizing their education to make it more meaningful. Underscoring any student's academic qualifications, expectations, intuition, credibility, or creativity, limits access to learning experiences and environments.

Socialization in heterogeneous classrooms across grade levels promotes opportunities for age-appropriate social skills to generalize. Mainstream settings provide opportunities for SED students to experience more naturally occurring consequences for exhibiting inappropriate behavior. Natural consequences assigned by peers are effective reminders of desired classroom behaviors. These types of consequences are less likely to initiate the passive/aggressive behavior cycle, commonly exhibited in teacher-student power struggles. In many self-contained SED classrooms, managing behavior takes precedence over teaching academics. SED programs rely on carefully designed social skill curriculums, intended to decrease individual outbursts while increasing self-esteem. Wielding this double-edged sword within the confines of a punitive, token-based framework accomplishes neither. Teaching self-esteem is not like making a jello salad; it requires no mold or set formula (curriculum). Self-esteem evolves through each stage of

the student's educational experience. Assuming self-esteem can be taught in lieu of or separate from academics precludes academic mastery as a probably commodity, generalizable at a later date.

Infusing choice-making activities within social and academic situations, SED students are provided opportunities to assume more proactive roles in the classroom. As collaboration increases between teacher and student, the role of the student is increased to developing lessons and monitoring the progress of each lesson. Encouraging choice-making skills for SED students lays a foundation for developing a system of self-monitoring class behavior and ultimately classwork. As these new behaviors reach fruition, self-correcting behaviors are gradually reinforced to accompany self-monitoring behaviors. Dissimilar from one-on-one teaching strategies, collaboration maintains a line of communication between teacher and student. Dialoguing, similar to the "life space interview" popularized by W. Glasser (Harris & McCormick, 1990), fosters in the SED student a more complete picture of his/her capabilities. Understanding an increased role may serve as an impetus for increasing self-esteem as well as involvement in the education process. Any form of school success, regardless of magnitude, contributes to social competence and the feeling of fitting in. According to Plata and Bone (1989), students possessing poor self-esteem and social perception have a higher incidence of dropping out of school than their regular education peers.

Periodic screening for academic growth and social development is well researched. McLoughlin and Lewis (1986) recommended early screening, diagnosis and treatment of inadequate and uneven development of certain learning skills. Early screening and diagnosis encourage timely interventions, reducing the need for more extensive services and social effort

later on. Accepting the premise that the transition process begins at birth compels the field of special education to establish job skills orientation at the lower elementary school level. These types of curricula may serve as a less intrusive form of education, augmenting the quality of life by gradually acquainting SED students with relevant job values.

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